

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-1502**

April 22, 2021

Dear Chair DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

I am requesting funding for Red Rock Prairie Trail (Iowa 117 to Co Rd S27) in surface transportation reauthorization legislation.

The project sponsor for this project is Jasper County Conservation, and the project is located near Highway 117, Prairie City, Iowa 50228.

The funding is designated for a 7-mile connection of multi-purpose trail to extend the route to Mitchellville, Iowa. Construction work for this project includes concrete trail paving on a former railroad grade beginning at Hwy 117 at the west end of Prairie City and continuing north to County Highway S27 in Mitchellville, Iowa.

The project is an appropriate use of taxpayer dollars and is anticipated to have the following benefits:

According to Jasper County Conservation, the 16-mile Red Rock Prairie Trail is planned to link the central Iowa towns of Monroe, Prairie City and Mitchellville. The trail connects directly to Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge's entrance road by way of bicycle accommodations across Highway 117's bridge over Highway 163. This trail corridor is an important component of the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and the long range goal of linking Lake Red Rock and Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge with Saylorville Lake and the Central Iowa Trail System throughout the Des Moines metro area.

This project is identified in the Iowa Bicycle and Pedestrian Long Range Plan, Iowa Trails 2000 State Trail Plan, and Iowa in Motion 2045. All three of these statewide Department of Transportation plans' Vision Maps include this as a major connection to pursue. The Central Iowa Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Action Plan 2020 labels it a Regionally Significant corridor. Its development was also adopted in Jasper County's master trails plan as well as each communities' (Monroe, Prairie City, and Mitchellville) comprehensive plan. The larger vision of connecting Saylorville Lake to Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge to Lake Red Rock has been a goal of the Rock Island Army Corps of Engineers for over 30 years. The Des Moines River Greenbelt Master Plan, which has existed for decades, refers to this route as "a priority development and one of the essential features of the Greenbelt."

There is currently no reasonable way for the vast majority of bicyclists to travel to Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. It is dangerous for bicyclist and pedestrians to be on a high-speed primary highway that does not have bicycle accommodation features. The proposed project works towards connecting these users to the Refuge from within the Des Moines metro area.

Moreover, the design of the project will make it an easily accessible way for cyclists of all abilities to enjoy the recreational and educational opportunities of the Refuge.

The proposed project will also be located within a half-hour drive of over 30 communities and within an hour's drive of 12 of the largest population centers in Iowa. The project will draw in a regional population of over 550,000 Iowans. The proximity to these other communities will draw outdoor enthusiasts to the communities along the proposed trail. The paved trail will bring money from outside of the communities into the area, creating economic opportunities to new and existing businesses. A key factor in generating ridership on a trail is to have a unique attraction: Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge in this case. The proposed trail will eventually link three Federal Land Management Agencies. The Refuge is midway between Saylorville Lake and Lake Red Rock, and all three will eventually be linked by the trail.

Finally, the Red Rock Prairie Trail will be free to the public and open to all ages, heritages, and capabilities. The trail may be an especially valuable resource for older and disabled Iowans, as the gentle slope of the existing rail grade does not exceed 5%, making it an easily accessible amenity for transportation and outdoor recreation. The paved surface of the trail will also allow easy use by those dependent on wheelchairs, sliding canes, and other mobility assistance. Other ADA design requirements will be included such as colored curb ramps and detectable warning mats.

I certify that neither I nor my immediate family have any financial interest in this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mariannette Miller-Meeks" followed by a small "md" monogram.

Mariannette Miller-Meeks  
Member of Congress